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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [NATO](#) [MARR](#) [HR](#) [SI](#)  
SUBJECT: SLOVENIA: COMMITTEE SUPPORTS CROATIA'S NATO  
ACCESSION 16-3, FULL PARLIAMENT TO VOTE JAN 29

Classified By: CDA Brad Freden, reasons 1.4(b,d)

11. (C) SUMMARY. Following a push by the Prime Minister to lobby wavering MPs, Slovenia's parliamentary foreign policy committee voted 16-3 on January 26 in support of ratification of Croatia's NATO accession. The three votes against ratification came from one Slovene People's Party (SLS), one Slovene National Party (SNS), and one unaffiliated parliamentarian. The full parliament plans to vote on -- and is expected to approve -- the ratification on January 29. However, the Slovenian constitution makes it relatively easy to force a referendum, which could allow nationalist opponents to further delay -- but probably not derail -- final ratification. In the unlikely event that a referendum does gain traction, the government will be called upon to demonstrate stronger public leadership on this issue than it has to date. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) A tired but obviously pleased chairman of the Foreign Policy Committee, Ivo Vajgl, told us January 26 that he expects the vote in parliament to mirror the committee vote. Today's discussion had been "rough," Vajgl said, with a small but vocal group of opponents essentially accusing the government of treason. Vajgl noted that one of the questions put to him in the subsequent press conference was, "Were you pressured by the Americans?" He answered truthfully, "no."

13. (SBU) SLS and SNS party leaders, who only have 10 votes in parliament, oppose ratification and have called for a referendum if the full parliament approves. If two-thirds of parliament votes in favor of ratification on January 29, there is an 8-day period during which there can be a request for a referendum on the issue by gathering only 2500 signatures. If there is such a request, there is then a 45-day period to gather 40,000 signatures, according to administrative criteria, to send the issue to a full referendum. Slovenian contacts tell us that since the signature requirement recently increased to 40,000, they doubt it can be met. However, the deposit of the instrument could be delayed until March 20 to cover the 8 and 45-day waiting periods. At that point, the official gazette would publish the ratification protocol, and one day later, the government would send it to Washington.

Comment  
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14. (C) The 16-3 vote is an encouraging sign that parliament will get the 60 votes necessary on January 29. We will continue to encourage the government to exercise leadership in shepherding through this important vote. We agree with our Slovene contacts that SLS and SNS are likely to gain little traction with their calls for a referendum, but they may be able to delay final ratification until the middle of March. We will look for opportunities to meet with the Slovene People's Party (SLS) -- the more "responsible" of the

two parties -- to try to turn their focus on this issue away from Croatia and toward NATO.

¶5. (C) Pahor has demonstrated on more than one occasion that he can exercise strong leadership behind closed doors. He imposed his will during coalition negotiations, facing down unruly partners who demanded key ministries. However, his public leadership skills remain largely untested, and he remains extremely skittish about getting too far out ahead of the public when it comes to relations with Croatia. He needs encouragement from us, but will not respond well to outright pressure. We hope that a strong vote in support of Croatia's NATO membership will improve the atmosphere sufficiently to allow Zagreb to make a symbolic reciprocal gesture. This in turn could give Pahor the political cover he needs to do what he knows is the right thing for Slovenia and for Europe: hold the door open for Croatia's entry into NATO and the EU.  
END COMMENT.  
FREDEN